

## **What is leprosy?**

Leprosy is a chronic bacterial disease of the skin, nerves in the hands and feet, and lining of the nose. Leprosy is rare in the U.S., but there are several million cases worldwide.

## **Who gets leprosy?**

Anyone can get leprosy, but it is not as easily spread from person to person as previously thought.

## **How is leprosy spread?**

It is still not clear how leprosy is spread, but household and prolonged close contact with a person with leprosy appear to increase the risk of disease. The bacteria are probably spread by contact with the discharges of the nose of a person with the disease. Contaminated objects may also play a role in spreading the bacteria to others.

## **What are the symptoms of leprosy?**

The symptoms of leprosy can be very different depending on what type of leprosy and what part of the body is affected. Some common symptoms include sores on the skin, numbness in the hands and feet, nodules on the body and a blocked/stuffy nose.

## **How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?**

On average it takes from 4 to 8 years for symptoms to appear depending on the type of leprosy.

## **How long can an infected person spread leprosy?**

In most cases, a person will not infect others after three days to three months of being treated, depending on the type of treatment.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Leprosy is diagnosed by examining a biopsy of the skin.

## **What is the treatment for leprosy?**

Specific antibiotics can be prescribed by a doctor to treat leprosy. Treatment usually involves more than one drug taken for a long time, i.e., months to years.

## **How can leprosy be prevented?**

The best way to prevent the spread of leprosy is early diagnosis and treatment of people who are infected. The disease may also be prevented through handwashing. Household and other close contacts should be seen by a doctor right away and then every year for five years after contact with a person who has the disease. A doctor may prescribe preventive medicine for some contacts.

